

in the country legally. This amendment would have harmed elderly or disabled individuals who would be impoverished despite having paid into the Social Security system for many years and would deny innocent American children who are born to these workers survivor benefits, regardless of how long their mother or father worked and paid taxes in the United States. In addition, the Ensign amendment would have forced taxpayers to pay more for the means-tested welfare programs to which these impoverished individuals would have had to turn. For these reasons, I opposed the Ensign amendment, and I am pleased that the majority of my colleagues did as well.

Mr. President, the end result of several weeks of hard work is bipartisan, compromise legislation that will bring meaningful reforms to a system that has long been broken. The bill is far from perfect, but on balance, I believe it is a victory for supporters of comprehensive reform. But as the saying goes, it ain't over 'til it's over. In order for this legislation to become law, we need our colleagues in the House to work with the Senate during the conference committee process and to adopt a comprehensive approach to this issue. And we need the President, who has come out in favor of comprehensive reform, to stay invested in this process. He has spoken, but now he must act. We will need his help in convincing members of the House to abandon ill-conceived notions like criminalizing undocumented people and those who provide humanitarian support to them, and chiseling away at due process rights. The President's leadership, and the willingness of House leaders to work with the Senate, will be crucial in order to retain the important reform provisions contained in this bill during the conference process.

This is a defining moment for America, and I am hopeful that the Senate, the House, and the President will work together so that we can build on this success and enact a comprehensive reform bill by the end of this Congress.

COSPONSORSHIP OF S. 1112

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, I would like to lend my support to S. 1112, the College 529 Invest Act of 2005, which I cosponsored today. A college education is more important today than it has ever been before. As the intrinsic value of a college education has increased, so too has the financial costs associated with it. In the last 10 years, the cost of a 4-year college education at a public institution increased 59 percent, while in public institutions it has grown by 42 percent. This increased cost dramatically outpaces average family income growth during the same time period.

It is not surprising that Montanans have expressed concerns about how they will pay such a hefty pricetag for their children's futures. It is our responsibility in the Senate to make sav-

ing for college manageable for many families who also struggle to save for their own retirement and may live from paycheck to paycheck. Federal programs can defray some of the costs, but this alone cannot pay the bills. Tax relief passed in 2001 permitted States to implement their own plans, creating a tax benefit for those families who chose to invest in them. Since 1998, 12,539 qualified tuition program accounts total more than \$146 million in Montana alone.

Without congressional action, the tax benefits of these plans will expire in 2010. Withdrawals made after 2010 will be subjected to taxation that means in just a little over 3 years from now, parents who invested in these 529 plans for the tax benefits will face an unanticipated tax liability. This sunset provision casts serious doubt on the likelihood a family would set up a 529 plan given such uncertainty. S. 1112 would make the tax provisions of these important plans permanent, providing much-needed certainty to parents and their children heading off to college in the future.

HOLD ON NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today to attempt, once again, to raise awareness of the plight of countless rural communities due to the impending expiration of the Secure Rural Schools and County Self-Determination Act. I regret that the lack of concern at the White House and the inertia in Congress forces me to put a hold on David Bernhardt, the administration's nominee for Interior Solicitor. It is time for everyone to focus their attention on the needs of the more than 700 rural counties in over 40 States that are depending on the reauthorization of this county payments legislation.

Thus far, the administration's solution to funding county payments is unacceptable. The county payments law, which provides a stable revenue source for education, roads, and other county services in rural areas, is due to expire at the end of this year. In early 2005, I coauthored a bipartisan bill, S. 267, to reauthorize county payments for another 7 years. The bill has 26 Senate cosponsors. In February, the administration proposed reauthorizing the law for only 5 years while cutting funding by 60 percent and funding that reduced portion with a controversial Federal land sale scheme. In response, Senator BAUCUS proposed a sensible, alternative funding source for county payments, a proposal which I was pleased to cosponsor. Our legislation fully funds county payments by ensuring that a portion of Federal taxes are withheld from payments by the Federal Government to government contractors. The Federal Government currently does not withhold taxes when it pays government contractors. Recently, however, over my objections, Congress approved a major tax bill that uses the Baucus

proposal to instead provide tax cuts for this country's most fortunate few. This lack of regard for the historic obligations of the Federal Government to rural counties severs a vitally important funding lifeline to communities throughout the country.

I will hold this nominee—and many nominees coming after him, if need be—until the administration finds an acceptable way to fund county payments.

DO THE WRITE THING CHALLENGE 2006

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, the Do the Write Thing Challenge, or DtWT, is a national program that gives middle school students the opportunity to reflect on and express themselves about youth violence in their communities. DtWT combines classroom discussion with a writing contest that focuses on personal responsibility in solving youth violence problems. Since it was created in 1994, more than 350,000 middle school students have participated in DtWT activities, and the program has grown to include participants from 28 different jurisdictions, including Detroit, MI.

In 2005, more than 32,000 students participated in the DtWT writing contest. To participate, students are asked to write an essay, poem, play, or song that addresses the impact of violence on their life, the causes of youth violence, and the things that they can do to prevent youth violence around them. As part of their participation in the contest, students are also asked to make a personal commitment that they will put their thoughts into action by working to help stop youth violence in their daily lives.

Each year, a DtWT Committee made up of community, business, and governmental leaders from each participating jurisdiction reviews the writing submissions of the students and picks two national finalists, one boy and one girl, from their area. I am pleased to recognize this year's national finalists from Detroit, Demetrius Adams and Tiffini Baldwin, for their outstanding work and dedication to the prevention of youth violence.

Both Demetrius and Tiffini wrote about the serious effect that guns, gangs, and drugs can have on the lives of teenagers. Their writings demonstrate a deep understanding of the impact that a single act of violence can have on an entire community. I am impressed by the maturity they have shown in their work and congratulate them on being selected as national finalists.

In July, Demetrius and Tiffini will join the other DtWT national finalists in Washington, DC, for National Recognition Week. During the week's activities, the national finalists will attend a recognition ceremony and have their work permanently placed in the Library of Congress. In addition, they will have the opportunity to share